

The Official FAQ... Tandem Nursing (SHORT VERSION)

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Will I like tandem nursing?

Like everything else when a new baby first arrives, tandem nursing tends to be intense and unpredictable. Chances are it will be a godsend in many ways: helping with engorgement, helping meet the older child's needs and the baby's needs simultaneously, keeping the older child's immunity up, providing incomparable nutrition for the older child, and providing a quick fix for temper tantrums. Moms who can comfortably nurse both children lying down may actually get to nap!

Tandem nursing can also be stressful at times. You may need to nurse an over-tired toddler to sleep but the baby doesn't want you to lie down. You may find that nursing your older child causes an intense agitation (perhaps especially when the baby is also nursing). Some moms are disappointed to find that their breastfeeding relationship with their older child can feel negative for a while. Above all remember that your relationship with your older child can survive the bumps and surprises involved with adding a new baby to the mix. Many tandem nursing mothers find that the early weeks are the hardest and that they enjoy it much more after everyone is a little more settled.

How can I answer critics?

"I have researched this choice and judged it to be safe and advantageous for our family." "Breastfeeding helps me meet the needs of my older child while tending to the baby." And the classic tandem nursing retort: "That's why I have two!"

Will I have enough milk for two?

Both research and anecdotal evidence assure us that a mother breastfeeding two or more children has the capability to produce large amounts of milk. As with any nursing relationship, factors like breast reduction surgery or adoption can affect the amount of milk produced, but the only supply concern generally reported by tandem nursing mothers is *oversupply*, rather than undersupply.

Nutrition for mom

A reasonably well-nourished mother can continue to meet her own needs and the needs of both her children. A tandem nursing mother may need considerable calories, and the exact number will vary depending upon the percentage of breastmilk in the nurslings' diets and mom's activity level, weight and nutritional status. Let your appetite be your guide.

Does my newborn always need to nurse first?

Although you may be advised to make sure the newborn always nurses first, this advice usually only holds for the first few days until your milk "comes in." Because colostrum is in limited supply after birth, you will want to ensure that your newborn gets first dibs.

Nipple soreness and engorgement after birth

During pregnancy, nipple pain is generally caused by hormonal changes. By contrast, if you notice nipple pain in the early days after your baby is born, you should assume there is a problem in need of a solution.

The sensation of fullness when the milk "comes in" is likely to come earlier for you now that you are a second (or more!)-time-mom. Engorgement is a common problem in the early days for mothers whether they are tandem nursing or not. The most important thing you can do to reduce engorgement is to ensure that your baby has frequent opportunity to suckle at the breast. As a tandem nursing mother you have an ace in the hole: your toddler! Your toddler's nursing can relieve engorgement, and a less full breast may also be easier for your newborn to latch onto.

Positioning and tandem nursing

To find your best arrangement for nursing two at once you will need to experiment and try a variety of pillows. Try double cradle (newborn's legs on toddler), double football (with newborn propped on a pillow and toddler sitting next to you, knees pointing away), or a combination. Try side-lying with your older child perched on your side or kneeling behind you, or lying on your back with each child propped on a pillow. If it is hard to coordinate in the early days, try again later—it does get easier!

Will tandem nursing spread germs?

No special measures are normally needed as far as hygiene and the sharing of breasts. There is no reason to wash nipples or breasts between children and, as always during lactation, use of soap on the nipple is not recommended except under special circumstances. In general, even if one child becomes sick, there is no reason to take any special precautions. Lots of hand washing is more important for limiting the spread of infection, and the anti-infection properties of breastmilk will also help to prevent the spread of illness.

How does tandem nursing affect sibling rivalry?

Many tandem nursing mothers say that "reduced sibling rivalry" is one of the biggest advantages of tandem nursing. Some nurslings hold hands while they nurse and prefer to nurse together. But it is important to bear in mind that some emotional upheaval is natural while everyone is getting used to a new baby in the house. Having realistic expectations can help you take these ups and downs in stride.

Based upon information from the book
Adventures in Tandem Nursing (© 2003, LLLI) by Hilary Flower

For our full-length *Official FAQ* (including references), see:
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